



सत्यमेव जयते



**Role of RKVY in protecting the Interests of
the farmers and consumers during the
COVID-19
Lockdown period and subsequent restricted
environment**



**TAMIL NADU WATERSHED DEVELOPMENT AGENCY
CHENNAI - 32**



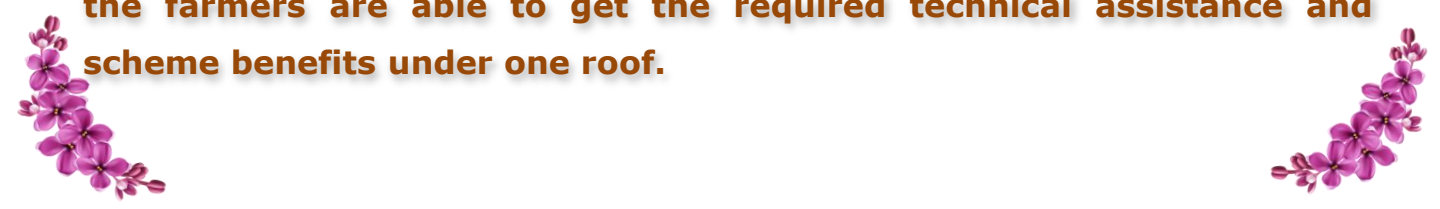
Role of RKVY in protecting the Interests of the farmers and consumers during the COVID-19 Lockdown period and subsequent restricted environment

COVID 19 came in as a sudden shock particularly to the farmers of Tamil Nadu as the harvesting season for paddy, pulses, groundnut and most of the vegetables and seasonal fruits like banana, mango, pine apple, watermelon, muskmelon and jack and planting season of vegetables and summer paddy coincided with this period. In view of this, the Lockdown announced from 24.03.2020 raised a lot of apprehension among the farmers.

The Department of Agriculture, in anticipation of field level issues, took many interventions and issued advisories time to time to tide over the extra ordinary situation and facilitate smooth operations in respect of planting and harvesting of crops and marketing of produce. Ensuring availability of essential commodities was given utmost importance. Multifarious activities and various sources of funds were involved in making the agricultural machinery run smoothly in the State of which the contribution made by RKVY projects is significant.

1. The role of Integrated Agricultural Extension Centres created under RKVY:

Infrastructure creation for facilitating agriculture growth is greatly emphasized under RKVY. Accordingly, Integrated Agricultural Extension Centres (IAECs) created under RKVY over the years have been a boon particularly during the Covid-19 lockdown and subsequent restrictions. As the block level officials of agri sector departments like Agriculture, Horticulture, Agricultural Engineering and Agricultural Marketing are accommodated comfortably in these block level IAECs, the farmers are able to get the required technical assistance and scheme benefits under one roof.



The IAECs are very well qualified to be called as "One Stop Shops" for most of the farmers' requirements. Provision of decent floor space for officers, staff and visitors has been helpful in maintaining the social distancing norms and adhering to Covid-19 protocols. Since the year 2015-16, 156 IAECs have so far been created in the State under RKVY and 9 are under construction out of 383 existing block level set up. The importance of these IAECs has been starkly felt when compared to the blocks devoid of IAECs.



Input Distribution to Farmers from IAEC Godown



Farmers in front of IAEC



Input Distribution to beneficiary farmers following social distancing norms

2. Involvement of Farmer Producer Organizations in pooling and distribution of farm produce and Groceries :

Farmer Producer Organizations/Farmer Producer Companies (FPOs/FPCs) have been given a major push in Tamil Nadu under RKVY and NMSA-RAD. So far, 268 FPOs have been formed under RKVY under these two programmes. These FPOs and FPCs have come as real saviours during the lockdown period. The members of FPOs and other farmers in the vicinity were assured of forward and backward linkages. The FPOs were roped in to take up the dual role of procurement at the farm gate as well as supply to the consumers at their doorsteps. During the complete lock down period, 245 MT of fruits, 1,192 MT of vegetables and 233 MT of Groceries were supplied by 113 FPCs through various Marketing channels.

Also, some of the FPCs have qualified themselves to act as Market Integration Partners (MIPs) and have proved their mettle by running the Primary Processing Centres (PPCs) for perishables established under the Tamil Nadu Supply Chain Management Project. 26 PPCs are operated by the FPCs wherein vegetables and fruits are collected, primary processing like cleaning, sorting, grading and packing is done for sale through various means. The FPCs were encouraged by providing up to Rs.10 lakh as revolving fund based on their eligibility.

3. Integrated Farming System – Sustainable income despite COVID conditions :

Integrated Farming System (IFS) Project under RKVY is implemented since 2018-19 in the State. With its proven success in increasing the farm income and potential to recycle the farm resources in a better manner, IFS was implemented with more importance during 2020-21 with an aim to create 2500 units given the Covid situation. IFS Project was implemented in 23 districts in Wetland/Garden land area by providing an assistance of Rs.60,000 per IFS unit for the components viz., Crop cultivation, Fodder crop, Vermicompost units, Milch cows, Goats, Poultry Birds, Kitchen Garden, Fruit Plants and Apiary units.

The scheme was widely publicized through pamphlet distribution and through public media in the implementing villages. The applications from interested farmers were received, scrutinized and selected according to the norms specified in the guidelines. The selected beneficiaries were approved by the District Collector.



Trainings for officials were conducted with due precautionary measures with mask and social distancing in the month of August.



The Farmer's trainings and Exposure visits were conducted from September following COVID precautionary measures.



The inputs like Certified seeds, Bio-fertilizers, Bio-agents were provided from the Agriculture depots at subsidized rates.



The technologies like bund cropping, sowing of fodder crop, Apiray Units management, Vermicomposting etc., were demonstrated to the farmers.



The fruit seedlings were sourced from the State Horticultural Farms and distributed to the farmers either in small groups or were directly distributed near the residence of farmers.



The Animal Husbandry components were implemented from January 2021 after the animal shandies were opened up after lock down. The purchase was done in a phased manner adopting Covid Precautionary measures and 100% purchase of Milch Cows, Goats and Poultry Birds were done with the coordination of the Animal Husbandry Department.



The Apiary Units were sourced and distributed to the beneficiaries. For Kitchen Garden, quality Vegetable/Green seeds were sourced and distributed to the farmers.



The Fodder slips, Seeds were sourced and distributed to the farmers. The Multicut Fodder varieties provide nutritious green fodder to the Cattle and goats within the farm avoiding outside purchase.





Agriculture combined with animal husbandry not only gives additional income and employment opportunity to the family members round the year particularly in the lockdown period and also waste from livestock utilized as manures lower the cost of fertilizers. Crop residues used as livestock feed will reduce the feed cost. Fodder crops like sorghum, maize and forage grass when fed to animals improve the Quality and Quantity of the milk. Small and Marginal farmer beneficiaries who had cultivated the crop with the allied enterprises; the returns from agriculture, milk and meat are high and fetch them more income. Also the family gets a balanced nutrition from Milk, Eggs, Meat, Greens and Vegetables from the farm.

Thus the Department of Agriculture, through this RKVY project has promoted the concept of self reliance among the 2,500 farm families so that they grow their own food, Vegetables get year round income and employment with increased standard of living besides sustaining the soil health.

4. Production and Productivity enhancement activities under RKVY:

The Agriculture and allied sectors have emerged as the Silver Lining in the Economy during the Covid period. On "Day One" of the lockdown ie., 24.03.2020, guidelines were issued on the exemption from restrictions given for agricultural activities including transport and Marketing of produce and movement of agricultural machineries for the benefit of both the farmers and consumers. It was advised to keep the Farmers' markets and Regulated Markets open for hassle free sale of perishables and other agricultural commodities.



Under RKVY, as the State had already completed the process of holding the meeting of SLSC and approval of projects before the lockdown was imposed, the fund release from Government of India as well as State Government was regularly made and production related projects and activities were carried out without any slackness.

a. Assistance extended to Paddy farmers at an outlay of Rs.40 crore:

- ❖ 5,049 farmers and FPG/FPO were provided assistance under RKVY to produce 5,213 MT of paddy seeds of newly released varieties.
- ❖ 2,500 MT of Paddy seeds were distributed to 48,639 farmers.
- ❖ 3250 Tarpaulins were distributed to store the harvested produce during the pandemic period.



Assistance for SRI/Paddy Transplanting



Tarpaulin distribution

b. Encouraging Fallow land owners to go for crop cultivation:

The lock down and its after-effects made many people realize the importance of crop production. Many land owners who had left their lands fallow by migrating to cities were persuaded to take up cultivation in their lands by providing assistance for Bush Clearance, Ploughing, Land Levelling and inputs at a total outlay of Rs.10.40 crore under RKVY. This was helpful in reverse migration of land owners to rural areas by providing opportunities for family labour and income from land. By this Project,

❖ An additional area of 10,351 Ha of Fallow Land has been brought under crop cultivation during Covid period.

❖ An additional production of 1,789 MT of Millets, 1,982 MT of Oilseeds and 3,422 MT in pulses has been achieved.



Millet cultivation in Fallow land

c. Assistance extended for Redgram and Castor production:

Rs.2 crore was extended as assistance to 4,500 farmers growing Redgram, Castor and sunflower with vital inputs at subsidized rate.



Assistance for Redgram Production



Assistance for Castor Production

d. Assistance for control of Fall Army Worm in Maize:

Fall Army Worm in Maize which was first noticed in the country as well as in Tamil Nadu in 2018-19 devastated the Maize crop in as high as 2 lakh Ha. During 2020-21, assistance of Rs.2000/- per Ha for carrying out standard IPM practices recommended by Government of India for seed treatment, bio control agents, prophylactic sprays of Azhadirachtin/recommended chemical was given under RKVY at a total outlay of Rs.20 crore. Under this project, income of 97,000 Maize farmers was stabilized by controlling Fall Army Worm infestation in 1,00,000 Ha.



Fall Army Worm in Maize

5. Tractor operated Trench Cutting Machines for facilitating the implementation of Micro Irrigation Scheme

As Tamil Nadu is a water starved State, Micro Irrigation is given impetus to bring more area under irrigation and Tamil Nadu has a vision to bring the entire well and bore well irrigated areas under Micro Irrigation by the year 2023-24. Many strategies have been developed and engaged by the State to give a big push to Micro Irrigation. One such initiative is the procurement of 28 Tractor operated Trench cutting machines (TCM) by the Agricultural Engineering Department (AED) under RKVY at a unit cost of Rs.5.43 Lakh amounting to a total value of Rs.1.52 Crore during the year 2019 – 20 for the AED owned Tractors. They are meant to be hired out to the needy farmers for trench cutting purpose in respect of Drip Irrigation.



Drip Irrigation System is to be installed as per the design and the main as well as sub-main pipelines of the system are laid by excavating the trenches.

Since lockdown was declared to prevent the spread of COVID 19, the farmers faced huge labour problem to excavate trenches for laying the pipe lines. The Tractor operated Trench cutting machines could be used effectively for digging the trenches in time to avoid wastage of time and also to meet out the scarcity of labour.

The Tractor operated Trench cutting machine is able to complete 850 metre length of 1.5 ft x 1.5 ft trenches, within 50 hours of operation, over a period of 8 days. However, the same will require 80 man days (4 skilled labourers working for 20 days). Time required with Tractor operated Trench cutting machine is just 40% compared to manual labour saving 60% of time with the usage of Tractor operated Trench cutting machine.

The Tractor operated Trench cutting machine hired from AED is also very economical and works out to Rs.23 per metre (Rs.340 per hour x 8 hours / 120 metre) while the average cost per metre for manual labour works out to Rs.47 per metre (Rs.700 per labour x 3 Nos./45 m) which is almost double.

The farmers who have engaged the AED's Trench cutting machine are satisfied with the performance of the machine for timeliness, quality and cost economics. They have started preferring Tractor operated Trench cutting machine over the manual workers for trench excavation. Other than trench cutting, these machines are also used by the farmers for land leveling and bund forming works. During the COVID 19 period in the year 2020-21, the Tractor operated Trench cutting machines have worked for about 20,680 hours in the farmers' field for the benefit of farming community.





Tractor operated Trench Cutting Machine at Work in field

Apart from the above specific projects under RKVY which made a difference, the following activities of the Department of Agriculture were supportive of the implementation of RKVY projects and instrumental in making Agriculture sector and farmers thrive during the difficult period.

i. Facilitating Harvesting of Crops- Movement of machineries and agricultural Labourers :

- ❖ **Combine harvesters, threshers and other machineries and agricultural labourers were in high demand as the harvesting of paddy, pulses and groundnut and most of the vegetables and seasonal fruits had to be taken up.**
- ❖ **This was facilitated by issuing passes for the movement of machineries and labourers by coordinating with the district administration. Through these efforts, agricultural and horticultural crops in 3.66 lakh ha were harvested.**
- ❖ **The machineries available with Agricultural Engineering Department were pressed into service and the Custom Hiring Centres (CHCs) at block and village levels were kept functional for the benefit of farmers. 5,058 machineries were hired out by the CHCs which worked for 90,372 hours benefitting 24,277 farmers.**



**Paddy Combine Harvester at Work
in field**

